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AN INAUGURAL ODE

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By

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To
The American People

AN INAUGURAL ODE

UNDER this banner of ours,
unfurled
To the winds of the world,
We, by God's grace, Citizens, Sovereigns,
lords of this land,
Seeking a man among men,
Fixing on you for our choice
Once again,
Give you, this day, high place.
And the nation's voice,—
With a solemn roar
Like the murmur of wind in the trees,
With the might of the surge of the seas
As they break on the shore,—
Gives unto you, to command
Over our armies of peace,
And over our servants, who stand
At watch in the house.

Solemn and mutual vows
 We make this day;
To defend our fair temple of state,
To protect the pure spirit of laws,
 To watch and to pray
Against treason, within and without:
 Within,—for the fate
Of all our unborn generations
 Hangs on these vows we make:
 Without,—for our cause,
And this oath which you take,
Are the promise of peace to the nations.
 For our war,
Is the fight against war,
 And our strife
Is the struggle of right against wrong,
The battle of youth with doubt,
 Of life with death.
 And our song
Is the battle shout

Of a mighty army of peace;
The living breath
Of new-born harmonies,
That shall be sung
In every human tongue.

This is the oath you take,
As you take up the fight against wrong:
To defend,
Even unto the end,
This, our cause; this, the creed
We confess;
That Justice and Mercy endure,
With righteousness:
And naught else is sure,—
And naught less!
And the promised land shall belong
Not to the strong
But the meek, and to them who are pure
In heart and in deed.

Though men say
These are dreams, foolish dreams;
Though the way
Through the desert still seems
Blind, perilous, wearily, endlessly long;
Nay!

Though the very dust, that we raise
With our feet on the long trodden ways,
Shuts out all the light of our days;
Are we lost then, indeed!

Shall no leader be found, in our need!
Is this then our life, evermore to rehearse
Those tales that are told
Of the people of old,
Who were faithless, perverse,
And worshipped strange gods, which they
wrought
With the work of their hands!

Oh ye,
Ye who have climbed the heights and sought
The Lord's commands,
The table of that law which sets us free,
And, coming from the mountain, as of old
Have found our god a beast, and made of gold,
Lead us onward still!
Give us strength that we,
Out of our very weakness and our fears,
Make strong our will!
That these weak hands of ours may yet fulfil
The promise of the years;
And seize that kingdom, which by the Lord's
decree
Is ours to win; that country you behold
From lonely mountain heights, remote and
cold!

Shall we,
Whose forefathers dared to smite
From off their limbs and lives
The galling gyves,
Forged in the night
Of Egypt's darkness, and fled
That ancient tyranny
Of warring kings ;
Shall we
Not arise,
And cast from our eyes
The subtle spell that blinds our sight,
And, from our hearts, those ancient lies,
False visions of some far off paradise ;
Those fetters of the soul that stay our might ;
Those flesh-pots of the mind ; that wandering
light
Which leads where no true hills of promise
rise !
So shall we see,
When the true vision is at last revealed
This is our portion in that promised land !

A sacred soil, to till ; a place to stand
Against the Philistines ; a battle field,
Where we must fight and fall; yea, hand in
 hand,
Fight on, to fall again,—but never yield.

Since we have shunned the shadows that are
 cast
 Upon the air, mirages of the sky ;
Since now at last
The long, long dreary desert space is past ;
Shall we in very madness, drunk with pride,
 Set up base gods on high
Within the market place!
Or, seeking grace
 To guide,
And kneeling down, each man upon his hearth,
Search for the living laws, where still they lie,
 Scattered like seeds in the earth,

Till the children of men,
Toiling beneath the sun,
Shall raise them up again,
One by one,
As by a second birth,
And make them whole at last !

Now no more, as of old,
Does the dust of our striving by day
Blind the sight of our eyes,
Nor shut out the light of the sun
Ere the day's work is done.
For the wind of the Lord blows behind us,
and loud
Is the sound of it;
And as it was writ,
And the tale thereof told,
See, the columns of dust that arise
Are become as a pillar of cloud
In the skies,
To point out the way.

And behold,
When we gaze straight before us
Through these whirlwinds of dust,
And no longer look back on our track,
In a breath
The dark years of the desert are past,
And the shadows of death.
And the land
Of our hope is at hand;
Which the Lord shall restore us,
He in whom is our trust.

And our cup shall run o'er
In the day of our need,
And He shall restore
And make whole,
In us and our seed,
The great living soul
Of the teeming
World, ever dreaming
Of things that are to be.

These are the things we must do,
To be constant and true
To our vow.
So, here and now,
We bid you stand,
Stand and receive the sacred oath,—to protect
This fair temple of ours, which was planned
Through the ages of ages,
By the mind of the One
Great Architect;
This dream of the prophets and sages,
By whom the fair work was begun;
This house, which was made
By men's toil,
And the work of their hands,
Here under the sun;
This temple, which stands
As a refuge for men of all nations:
Whose strong foundations
Forever firm are laid

In the free soil
Of the fertile earth,
And in every heart, on every hearth,
Where'er still burn the sacred fires
Of liberty and brothers' love.
And this living wall
Shall never move,
These lofty towers
Shall never fall,
But by our guilt,
And to our scathe.
For behold, they are built
Of the blood of our sons and our brothers,
And the faith
Of our mothers;
And their glorious strength ever rests
In the graves of our sires,
And in our daughters' breasts.

So this temple of ours,
Which was made
For a refuge for men,
Has become as a house of the Lord.
So twice was it saved by the sword
Of our fathers, who fell
In faith's fierce endeavor,
That we, coming after, might dwell
Therein, unafraid,
With goodness and mercy forever.

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